

like a lover's voice across the mountainside

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Hatate finds out her neighbor has a nice figure, and then she goes down to the flower shop.

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Chapter 1

Hatate first sees her when she comes out of the bathroom.

She's writing her inhumanly-long essay for the day tomorrow when she sees a movement just in front of her, in the house opposite from hers. Before, she'd found it annoying since the person living in there never closed their bedroom curtains, but she'd gotten used to it by closing *hers*. Still, it made her slightly uncomfortable that their houses were so close to each other Hatate could open her window, climb out, and land right smack-dab in the other's house.

And now, just as she's about to write an amazing sentence she's sure is going to win over her professor (who's been hating her ever since she walked in his class, she's sure), she looks up, and she's greeted with a sight she'd never thought she'd ever be able to see.

Unsurprisingly, the first thing she thinks of is, *whoa, hot damn*.

The person in the other house - Hatate's yet to know their name, and she's not quite sure if she can jump to the conclusion that the person is a woman - seems to have just exited another door, presumably their bathroom, *judging by how they're pretty much naked except for the towel around their neck*, and Hatate's drawn the blinds before she knows what she's doing.

Safe to say, she tells herself, still blushing furiously, that I should just never open my curtains again.

'Yeesh, it's hot out.' The brunette looks over at her closed window. She's been feeling horribly restless, tip of her pencil tap-tapping against the table, absentmindedly flipping the pages of her notebook, so on and so forth - she's practically desperate for something to do that isn't academically related.

She's not going to open her curtains, though. A week or two after that incident isn't enough to make her forget.

Hatate closes her notebook and stands up, shrugging on her bag. Nothing else to do but take a walk - and anyway, she's just about finished for the rest of the semester, given how much she's already read and studied and written. Maybe she'll take a look at the flower shop just next to her house.

She gets herself a cone of mint ice cream with extra chocolate syrup before heading over to the quaint little shop, *Shameimaru Flowers* on the sign beside it. Hatate feels her nose itching a little - she's probably allergic to one of the flowers here - she *knows* she's allergic to a certain flower but she just doesn't know *what* it is - but that shouldn't be too important. Right?

She enters, and a cheery voice calls, "Welcome to Shameimaru Flowers!", and all she can think of is *what the fuck*.

After all, Hatate's only seen the woman behind the counter once - twice, now, if one would count this meeting - and on that occasion, the woman had been very much naked.

Only after about a full minute does Hatate realize she's staring like some starstruck teenager at the woman (who now looks quite confused and maybe a bit creeped out). The brunette clears her throat and starts browsing, more out of trying to look as casual as possible. Being her, it didn't work. She's not entirely surprised.

The woman coughs. "Anything in particular you're looking for?"

"Um," Hatate starts. Then she feels the overwhelming need to slap herself. "Not really. Just. Looking around." *I need to update my vocabulary*. A little voice in her head tells her to get out of the shop as soon as she could to keep things from getting even more awkward, and probably the least offending way to do that was to...

The brunette randomly gropes around for a bouquet of flowers and finds her hands clutched around a group of what look like flowers - lilac, to be specific. She doesn't feel a sneeze or an irritation around her palm coming on, so it's obvious it's not this sort of flower she's allergic to. "I'd like this," she says, voice a little stiff.

When she straightens, she can see the woman's smile, slightly crooked. "Lilac roses? Alright, then." She comes over and gently lifts the bouquet out of Hatate's grip (skin against skin brushing against each other and the brunette's sure she's gone mad) and taps some numbers on the register before she wraps a little red ribbon around the bouquet, a tag hanging off. Hatate digs through her wallet and just barely manages to pay her with what little she has left. The woman smiles and nods, once more. "Thank you for visiting!"

"R-Right." Hatate returns the nod and moves to head outside, but her eyes catch sight of something just above the woman's right breast - a nametag. Small and still gleaming. *Shameimaru Aya*.

What a nice name, she tells herself after placing the flowers in a vase in her home and filling it up with water. Then she sneezes. She hopes it's the dust in the house rather than an allergic reaction.

"Welcome to... oh!" Aya flashes a little smile at the familiar face. "Welcome back, miss! Here to make another purchase?"

No, Hatate wants to say. I actually have no idea why I'm here. Will it be rude if I turned around and went back the way I came and never leave the house again while I'm at it?

"Maybe," she replies, instead. Aya nods, smile never faltering, and Hatate wants to bang her head on the nearest convenient table repeatedly. *She's too cute. Too cute. Too cute. I have to get out of here.*

Another few random grabbing later, Hatate buys herself a bouquet of what are apparently white camellias. Aya smiles again, and says, "Would it be weird if I told you you're as pretty as this flower, miss?"

Hatate almost shrieks, but holds it back and just smiles stupidly big. Must be a very ugly flower, she nearly says, but changes it at the last second to a thank-you and you're very kind. Just as she exits the shop, she glances at the glass walls and spies Aya looking almost disappointed. *I'd play your game if I hadn't seen you naked, perhaps*, Hatate grumbles mentally, and buys herself a cheap plastic vase at the department store.

Just a peek, she tells herself. One second. Half a second. Alright, half a second. No longer! This is *only* to make sure she's actually that florist! And also so that she won't think I stay in my house all day like that hikkikomori from preschool. That's it!

Hatate draws her curtains open ever so slightly. An open window greets her. *Oh, it's hot today as well.*

Since it doesn't look like anybody's in the house (the brunette sorely wishes Aya's working in the flower shop for until some time), Hatate opens her window as well, just to let all the accumulated dust from the past few weeks out. Two sneezes later, she's quite comfortable sitting at her desk and scribbling away at her essay. She's almost forgotten how nice it feels to have a light breeze blowing in while she does her homework. Not that homework is relaxing in the least.

Then a fly buzzes in and starts hovering over her two vases filled with flowers, and Hatate grabs a textbook and smacks it out of the air with terrifying speed. She sits back down and pretends nothing had happened. A glance out the window later, she sees a familiar black mop of hair, and Hatate lets out a sigh.

She stands up and very nearly shuts the windows and draws the curtains again, ready to sacrifice her relaxation for privacy, when she sees that Aya (she's sure it's Aya now, the hair's unmistakable even

though she's only seen her about thrice) is actually fully clothed this time. Then again, she *was* being a little silly; why would there would be such a coincidence that the first time she'd open her windows again, the florist would be naked once more? She almost laughs - she'd been hilarious, hadn't she?

Then Hatate actually registers what the florist is doing, which is apparently singing out 80's pop songs out loud for the whole world to hear. Considering Aya's iPod looks to be on full-blast, and both females' windows are wide open, Hatate can very clearly hear *in a big country, dreams stay with you, like a lover's voice fires the mountainside* . Just before Aya finds out that the brunette next door is watching her, Hatate slams the windows shut and draws the curtains with unmatched speed.

A little later, when the blaring of music dies down, Hatate peeks outside once more. Aya's by her desk, which can also be translated to "extremely close to her very open window and can immediately see Hatate is she so much as looks up", humming some tune that Hatate can't quite make out and scribbling things down. Just before the brunette retreats back into her room, Aya glances over beside her to smile at a couple of flowers in a vase. They're white, Hatate can tell, but she's already back at her desk and looking pointedly down at her notebook before the temptation to call over the florist becomes too strong to resist.

Of course, it had to happen while Hatate was studying.

"Help! Oh, Christ on a stick, get me out of here! "

Usually, the brunette would completely ignore the call for help and continue writing - this entire paper would decide whether or not her head would be on her shoulders by the end of the year, after all, can't help it - but this voice sounded just a tad familiar. Curiosity aroused, she peeks out of her window and is face-to-face with a panicky florist whose face is just a little bit too close to hers.

Her natural reaction is to shriek and fall backwards, landing on her back on the hard floor. Aya comes flying in soon after, limbs flailing about as she lands atop the brunette, eliciting a noise from Hatate that sounds a little like a dying animal. The florist starts babbling apologies, but Hatate's a little more concerned at what sounds like the furious growling from outside her window. Just before a very angry white dog is about to bite the brunette's face off, Aya's flung herself forward and shut the windows at the very second the dog slams against the window panes. It whimpers, growls one last time at Aya, then pushes itself back inside Aya's room and starts pacing back and forth.

"Ah..." Aya sighs, collapsing to the floor and panting heavily. "Thank goodness I'm right next to your house... sorry for intruding, by the way, it's just--"

A pause. The florist actually gets a good look at the brunette, who's on her way outside the house.

"... Aren't you..."

Hatate winces. Aya halts in her speech, then reluctantly continues; "You're... one of my customers, right...?"

"I might be," Hatate answers vaguely, calculating with inhumane speed on how fast it would be to snatch her bag and her paper and dash right out the house, and if Aya was fast enough to follow her, if she would. Probably not worth the risk, but the embarrassing feeling washing over her makes her want to start running fast enough to kick up a dust cloud in Aya's face, if she decides to follow. Alright, she may have been feeling a little faint the past few days from being locked up in her room for nearly three straight days to work on her paper, but it's a valid excuse.

Aya raises an eyebrow, still panting (sweat trickling down her neck and deeper into her shirt and *I have to stop*), but looking a little more amused this time. "Yeah, you are! Can't believe you're the pretty girl who walked in a little while ago..." She grins, flashing bright white

teeth. "Hello, it's nice to properly meet you! I'm Shameimaru Aya, but if you looked at my nametag, you'd know that. What's your name, miss?" She stands up, albeit with still-shaking legs, and bows politely.

Hatate returns the smile with a weak, probably crooked one of her own. "Himekaidou Hatate. It's, um, nice to meet you as well. Shameimaru-san." She bows clumsily, then immediately looks away once she straightens. *She called me pretty again. Is she really joking?* "Um, if you don't mind..."

"Ah, right, right!" Aya gasps. "I'm sorry, I forgot! I should be heading back, but..." She peers out of the window, narrowing her crimson eyes at the white dog still snarling and growling and probably spitting all over the florist's furniture. "Momiji's gone wild again. I swear, that dog's gonna tear me to shreds one day when Nitori's not paying attention!"

"Your friend... set her dog on you?" Hatate asks, taking a seat at the edge of her bed so Aya won't see her knees knocking together. *Embarrassing, embarrassing... well, it could be worse, at least she's not naked...* "You can stay here for a little until the dog goes away. I won't mind."

Aya sighs. "Well, that's the problem! It's almost my shift at the shop, and my door's locked, so I wouldn't be able to get in without my keys, *which are in my bag...* " She grumbles under her breath some more, pacing back and forth in the room, leaving footprints as she goes in the dust-covered floor. Hatate prays to whatever deity is listening that the florist doesn't look down. "*And* I haven't finished writing the article on the newest scoop for my paper! Heavens, what am I going to do..."

"I could go in your house and get you your keys," Hatate suggests softly. It shouldn't be that hard, right? "I'll go in through the window again. Does the dog--"

"Momiji."

"Does Momiji bite strangers?"

"Mm..." Aya ponders over it for a moment, tapping her finger against her chin. The brunette tries not to look. "I guess not. She's actually pretty nice to everyone 'cept me. That dog..."

"In that case, I'll go." Hatate makes to stand up, but before she can, Aya's made a squeaky sound and pushing her back down on the bed forcefully. The brunette, in turn, immediately feels a searing heat building up all over her body and her struggles to get out are halfhearted at best. "Wh-Wh--"

"A-Are you serious?!" the florist cries out. "You'd really do that for me?! You'd brave the perils of Momiji and the height drop?! Himekaidou-san, you're amazing! You're a hero... a heroine, more of!"

"Please let me go," Hatate manages to sputter out, feeling sure her face is about to explode if any more blood rushed up to it. She's all but stopped moving by this point.

"... Oh." Aya jumps off immediately, red tingeing her cheeks and Hatate is only thinking of how grisly her room is going to look like once all the blood comes out of her nose. Before she can move to push herself up and off the bed, however, Aya extends a hand to her expectantly, a little smile on her face, still blushing a little. "I-I'm sorry! I guess I, uh, got a little carried away..."

Hatate accepts the hand with a face on fire and trembling knees; what she doesn't expect is for her to be pulled up with surprising strength and nearly nose-to-nose with the florist. From how close they are, the brunette can almost count how many freckles there are on the bridge of Aya's nose (*Goddamnit all to hell why does she have freckles, too? That's just not fair anymore*) and it would be so easy to just reach over and touch her cheek--

"Your eyes are pretty, too," Aya says, giggling and tightening the grip on Hatate's hand before letting go and stepping backwards. The moment the florist is out of the brunette's immediate space, Hatate nearly falls forward from how woozy she feels. "Anyway, if it's really okay... can you help me out with this one, miss?"

In the end, Hatate crawls over to Aya's house through the window (and she almost falls only once!), snatches her bag, or what she assumes is her bag because it's the only business-looking bag around, and tries to crawl back only for Momiji to start barking loudly. The next moment, the brunette is dangling off the edge, eyes wide in panic, and Aya just barely manages to pull her back up into her room. Hatate is understandably shaken - who wouldn't, really? - so Aya leads her to the flower shop for a little while to hang out because she "looks like she needs it".

To be fair: Aya's not wrong, but the florist's continued presence is most probably something Hatate would write down in her list of guilty pleasures. At the end of the day, Aya hands her a bouquet of pink and white flowers she calls the evening-scented stock and tells her she's still very pretty and the florist would love for her to visit every other day.

Another plastic vase, though perhaps not quite as cheap.

Another month passes by before Aya ("*finally*, " so says Nitori) holds her hand, their skin just barely brushing against each other just like their first (or technically second) meeting. Hatate is flushing bright red when the florist hands her something - just a single flower this time, the viscaria (I mean, Hatate thinks, those things aren't even found in her flower shop, what the hell), and Aya asks with a touch of shyness if she'd like to dance with her for a little.

In turn, Hatate buys two flowers from another shop that's a ton further away from her house - the yellow tulip and the white violet. She hands them both to Aya the next day and whispers "I like you a little" just before the florist swoops down and kisses the brunette on

her nose with the most childish of giggles and the widest of smiles Hatate's seen.

"I like you a little, too," she murmurs, low enough for just both of them to hear (but then again, no one else besides them is in the flower shop at that moment). "And your smile is so very pretty, just like the rest of you..."